

Education and Workforce Development Cabinet Vocational Rehabilitation receives grant for project to recycle and reuse medical equipment in Appalachia

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Contact Information:

FRANKFORT, Ky. – The Kentucky Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (KYOVR) was recently awarded a \$450,000 grant to develop the infrastructure to recycle and redistribute assistive technology and durable medical equipment (DME) in the Appalachian region of Kentucky.

Project CARAT (Coordinating and Assisting the Reuse of Assistive Technology), as it is titled, is a collaboration with the Kentucky Appalachian Rural Rehabilitation Network (KARRN), the Kentucky Assistive Technology Services (KATS) Network, the Bluegrass Technology Center (BTC), and several other partners. The goal is to improve the health and quality of life of individuals with disabilities who may not be able to afford the needed equipment to become independent.

Appalachian Eastern Kentucky has its own unique set of challenges. To accomplish its goal, CARAT will develop a system of providers who identify and collect unused assistive technology and DME; recondition and refurbish the equipment to make it suitable for use; and redistribute the equipment to individuals who need it and are unable to acquire it otherwise.

BTC Director Debbie Sharon says there are several small operations across eastern Kentucky that have equipment available, but the region as a whole does not have a group that coordinates the effort. "Our goal is to find all the lending closets that exist in churches and civic organizations in the region and to develop a way to get everyone to the table."

CARAT Project Coordinator Carol Weber says the idea is to first find the equipment and then to develop a database that will help others see what is available. "It is amazing how much of this equipment is barely used before being thrown away," Weber said. "We want to find the equipment, make repairs if necessary and find people who can use it to better their lives."

Some examples of equipment and assistive technology include power and manual wheelchairs, scooters, walkers, shower chairs and benches, augmentative communication devices, crutches, exercise equipment, environmental controls, hearing aids, etc.

The project officially began May 1 and is designed to become self-sufficient at the end of the three-year grant period. In the first year alone, the database will be designed and implemented, sanitation equipment will be purchased, a distribution chain will be developed and a distance learning project with physical therapy students from the University of Kentucky will begin.

For more information check out the website <http://www.bluegrass-tech.org/carat.html>.

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, an agency of the Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet's Department of Workforce Investment, assists Kentuckians with disabilities to achieve gainful employment and independence. For more information about services, call the office toll free at 1-800-372-7172 or visit the OVR website at www.ovr.ky.gov.

The Kentucky Education and Workforce Development Cabinet coordinates learning programs from P-16 and manages and supports training and employment functions in the Department of Workforce Investment. For more information, visit www.educationcabinet.ky.gov or www.workforce.ky.gov.